

Surviving the First Week in a New Job

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Starting a new job can be daunting for anyone, regardless of experience or rank. The first week, when it is *most* important to make a good impression and set a precedent for how you will manage your team, can be especially difficult.

You can easily view your first week as a hardship—something to be endured before you become a full-fledged team member. Or you can approach it with a positive perspective, taking the opportunity to establish your presence on the team and give your colleagues an idea of how you intend to operate. This way you won't just survive your first week; you may also find it enjoyable and rewarding.

There are many things that you can do to prepare for your first week in a new job and several techniques you can employ once on board to build a strong foundation for your future with the company.

What You Need to Know

What if I'm given something to do that I don't feel ready for?

Even managers can find new positions daunting. Different companies will have different role descriptions and expectations of their managers, which means that it is likely that elements of your new position will be new to you. In the long run, it pays to accept that you will not necessarily know how to do everything or know the company inside out, when embarking on new employment. Do not be afraid to admit your limitations; managers who propose to be superhuman only succeed in alienating employees and raising expectations that may not be realized in the long run. Do not be afraid to ask for clarification and help from those around you; even asking questions of the people you will be managing does not have to be out-of-bounds. In fact, by doing so you may find that you easily build good relationships with your staff as you demonstrate that you value their experience and knowledge of the job. It can also allow you to gauge which of your team members are enthusiastic and willing to help and which may harbor resentment.

How do I develop an employee/manager relationship when the people I am managing have been there so much longer than me?

Remember that you are there to manage and to lead your team and not necessarily to do their job. Ensure that you take on the role of manager as soon as you enter the company, but respect the experience of your staff and let them know that you value that experience.

How do I deal with difficult or resistant staff?

Demonstrating that you respect the knowledge and experience of the staff you will be managing will go a long way toward ensuring that they feel comfortable working with you, and in turn they will respect you as a manager. Ask them questions and involve them in your orientation during your first week. Try to relate to each member of the team individually during the week and observe how they react to you in your new position. Building up individual relationships with each team member can help you to negate any resistance they may have to the introduction of a new and unknown manager. Relate to your staff on a personal level and let them get to know you as a person in order to dispel any predetermined negative expectations that they may have built up in anticipation of your arrival. Any longer term resistance will need to be dealt with appropriately if and when it occurs.

How do I deal with the legacy left behind by my predecessor?

Whether your predecessor was loved or hated you will have to deal with the legacy he or she left behind. If your predecessor was loved, find out why. If he or she was disliked, then find out what it was about your predecessor that your staff did not like, and ask them what they would like from you as a manager. Listening to your team's thoughts about your predecessor can provide you with a great deal of insight into how best to lead your team.

What to Do

Prepare in Advance

Ensuring that you are well prepared in advance of your first week can make all the difference. It can help to build your confidence and can ensure that you get the most out of your first week.

It is likely that you will have done a fair amount of research prior to your interview for the position, so review that information and research the organization's structure, its strategy, how it takes care of its people, and even look to see if there are any recent developments cited in news publications. This research will familiarize you with the company and give you an insight into any recent issues or events that may have an impact on the company's culture and working environment.

Thinking about what you might need know when you arrive and remembering who you met during the interview process is often useful, since attempting to do so after you arrive can be difficult when faced with distractions. In addition, be sure that you have some clear personal objectives in mind regarding the kind of manager you want to be. You may have learned some lessons in your previous role that you can assess and acknowledge in order to keep firmly in mind your intentions for your new employment. On a rather basic level, you should know exactly when you will start. You might also ask your new company to mail or e-mail you some logistical details to make certain that you know where

to go and what to do upon arrival. You may even wish to ask your new company if there is anything specific that you can do to prepare—if nothing else, this makes a great impression!

Ask for Your Objectives

On your first day ask the person or people conducting your orientation to define what you will be doing during your first week, and how they intend to familiarize you with the company. You might, for example, wish to inquire about whether they intend to formally introduce you to your team, or whether they favor a more informal approach. That way you can be clear about how you will go about integrating yourself into the team.

Also, ask what your overall and long term objectives are at the outset. Once you get into the day-to-day details of a job, it can be easy to lose sight of the bigger picture, so setting your objectives is always a good way of creating a point of reference for the future. Do make sure that you revisit and review those objectives at regular intervals!

Remember People's Names

It sounds simple and obvious, yet remembering or forgetting names is something that can make a very good or a very bad impression. As a manager it is very important that you build rapport with your staff from the start and remembering their names is the most basic way of doing so.

Do Not Rely on Other People to Integrate You

It is essential that you take responsibility for integrating yourself with your team and with your colleagues and that you be proactive in introducing yourself to the people you meet. Since existing staff members can be fairly reticent and wary of new employees, especially new managers, it is worthwhile being forthcoming in interacting with them. If you wish to be seen as an approachable and sociable manager, you must demonstrate that you are willing to put forth the effort as soon as you enter the organization.

Observe

Your first week in a new job is likely to be the only time during which you can observe the working environment with true clarity and objectivity. Use this period before you are fully integrated into the culture to observe your colleagues and the culture without emotional involvement or subjectivity. Observe your surroundings and make note of those things that may effect your ability to manage your

team. Again, the things that you notice in your first week may not be so evident once you become preoccupied with everyday responsibilities and distractions, so it is worth noting your observations and referring to them at a later date. Do remember, however, that first impressions are not always accurate so avoid making generalizations or judgments; merely observe behavior and procedure and jot down any good ideas you might have.

What to Avoid

You Try to Make Changes Immediately

Though it is great to have ideas for making improvements, appearing critical in your first week is a sure-fire way of ruffling people's feathers. You may feel that you are simply offering sound advice, and that by recognizing problems and finding solutions, you are being constructive. To be able to identify and solve problems is a fine quality that can be respected and valued by organizations and colleagues; but doing so in your first week, when your colleagues do not necessarily know or trust you, is not a good idea. During your first few weeks, think about the issues you have identified and reserve your comments for a more appropriate time. Also, do not be hasty in condemning an organization's way of working too soon; use the first week as a time to ask questions, observe how things are done, and fully understand the processes in place. Learn *why* things are done the way they are, since processes may be in place for very good reasons. Asking diplomatic questions such as, "I'm interested in knowing why you do this in this way" or, "How did you decide to do it this way?" is a good way of understanding the culture and gaining a view of why things are done the way they are, even if you might initially feel that they do not constitute good practice.

You Fail to Adapt to Your New Culture

Bringing experiences from your previous employment is invaluable and inevitable, but avoid trying to recreate your previous workplace, as it is unlikely to be effective. Learn to adapt and mold yourself and your experience to your new surroundings, rather than expecting them to mold around you.

Where to Learn More

Books:

Sindell, Milo, and Thuy Sindell, Sink or Swim: New Job. New Boss. 12 Weeks to Get It Right. Adams Media, 2006.

Blitzer, Roy J., and Jacquie Reynolds-Rush, Find the Bathrooms First: Starting Your New Job on the Right Foot. Crisp Publications, 1999.

Web Sites:

Forbes.com:

www.forbes.com/careers/2006/10/24/leadership-careers-jobs-lead-careers-cx_tw_1024bizbasics.html

Helium: www.helium.com/tm/258138/starting-position-important-federal

The Effective Admin: www.admin-ezine.com/new_job_no_no.htm

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